

Senate Inquiry into National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention Legislation

Suicide Prevention Australia – Responses to Questions on Notice

Senator Lambie:

“Do either of you have any studies on why they're taking their lives while serving in defence? ... I'd like to know when the most up-to-date study was done on those that are attempting to take their lives while serving in defence.”

Much of the research on the risk factors for suicide in serving defence force personnel is conducted in the USA. Risk factors identified in recent studies include:

- Gender – suicide attempts more likely among deployed soldiers who are women, but for never deployed soldiers male risk is higher
- Mental illness / diagnosis
- Military career characteristics / seniority
- Length of service – more likely in earlier years
- White race/ethnicity
- Bereaved by suicide

The following are references for the studies from which the above list was compiled:

- Street, A. E., Gilman, S. E., Rosellini, A. J., Stein, M. B., Bromet, E. J., Cox, K. L., Colpe, L. J., Fullerton, C. S., Gruber, M. J., Heeringa, S. G., Lewandowski-Romps, L., Little, R. J., Naifeh, J. A., Nock, M. K., Sampson, N. A., Schoenbaum, M., Ursano, R. J., Zaslavsky, A. M., Kessler, R. C., & Army STARRS collaborators (2015). Understanding the elevated suicide risk of female soldiers during deployments. *Psychological medicine*, 45(4), 717–726. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329171400258X>
- Zuromski KL, Bernecker SL, Gutierrez PM, et al. Assessment of a Risk Index for Suicide Attempts Among US Army Soldiers With Suicide Ideation: Analysis of Data From the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS). *JAMA Netw Open*. 2019;2(3):e190766. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.0766
- Ursano, R. J., Kessler, R. C., Stein, M. B., Naifeh, J. A., Aliaga, P. A., Fullerton, C. S., Wynn, G. H., Vegella, P. L., Ng, T. H., Zhang, B. G., Wryter, C. L., Sampson, N. A., Kao, T. C., Colpe, L. J., Schoenbaum, M., McCarroll, J. E., Cox, K. L., Heeringa, S. G., & Army STARRS Collaborators (2016). Risk Factors, Methods, and Timing of Suicide Attempts Among US Army Soldiers. *JAMA psychiatry*, 73(7), 741–749. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2016.0600>
- Naifeh, J.A., Mash, H.B., Stein, M.B. et al. The Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS): progress toward understanding suicide among soldiers. *Mol Psychiatry* 24, 34–48 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-018-0197-z>
- Melanie A. Hom, Ian H. Stanley, Peter M. Gutierrez, Thomas E. Joiner,, Exploring the association between exposure to suicide and suicide risk among military service members and veterans, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Volume 207, 2017, Pages 327-335, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.09.043>

Senator Lambie:

“which providers, including yourselves, have had any reports done on the medico legals that veterans have to go and see? They're appointed by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. ... I just want to know if there are any other providers you deal with out there or any other peak bodies that have looked into medico legals when it comes to veterans, and about the reports they're doing.”

We were unable to identify any recent reports conducted by providers or peak bodies on medico-legal firms used by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Senator Molan:

“I am trying to understand the issue of privacy and the exclusion of the Privacy Act. Do you think current privacy laws impinge upon information-sharing about suicide across the community, including for suicide prevention? Do you see that?”

To our knowledge current privacy laws do not in general impinge on information-sharing for suicide prevention.

Subsequent written question on notice

Senator Lambie:

Do Mental Health Australia or Suicide Prevention Australia receive funding from DVA or Defence?

Suicide Prevention Australia does not receive funding from the Department of Veterans' Affairs or from the Department of Defence.